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Arm of the Law

Harry Harrison

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About Harrison:

Before becoming an editor, Harrison started in the science fiction field as an illustrator, notably with EC Comics' two science fiction comic books, Weird Fantasy and Weird Science. A large number of his early short stories were first published under house pseudonyms such as 'Wade Kaempfert'. Harrison also wrote for syndicated comic strips, creating the 'Rick Random' character. Harrison is now much better known for his writing, particularly his humorous and satirical science fiction, such as the Stainless Steel Rat series and the novel Bill, the Galactic Hero (which satirises Robert A. Heinlein's Starship Troopers). During the 1950s and 60s he was the main writer of the Flash Gordon newspaper strip. One of his Flash Gordon scripts was serialized in Comics Revue magazine. Harrison drew sketches to help the artist be more scientifically accurate, which the artist largely ignored. Not all of Harrison's writing is comic, though. He has written many stories on serious themes, of which by far the best known is the classic novel about overpopulation and consumption of the world's resources Make Room! Make Room! which was used as a basis for the science fiction film Soylent Green (though the film changed the plot and theme). Harrison for a time was closely identified with Brian Aldiss and the pair collaborated on a series of anthology projects. Harrison and Aldiss did much in the 1970s to raise the standards of criticism in the field. Harrison is a writer of fairly liberal worldview. Harrison's work often hinges around the contrast between the thinking man and the man of force, although the "Thinking Man" often needs ultimately to employ force himself. Source: Wikipedia

Also available on Feedbooks Harrison:

- *Planet of the Damned* (1962)
- *Deathworld* (1960)
- *The Misplaced Battleship* (1960)
- *The Repairman* (1958)
- *Toy Shop* (1962)
- *The Ethical Engineer* (1963)
- *The K-Factor* (1960)
- *The Velvet Glove* (1956)
- *Navy Day* (1954)

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Transcriber's Note:

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It was a big, coffin-shaped plywood box that looked like it weighed a ton. This brawny type just dumped it through the door of the police station and started away. I looked up from the blotter and shouted at the trucker's vanishing back.

"What the hell is that?"

"How should I know?" he said as he swung up into the cab. "I just deliver, I don't X-ray 'em. It came on the morning rocket from earth is all I know." He gunned the truck more than he had to and threw up a billowing cloud of red dust.

"Jokers," I growled to myself. "Mars is full of jokers."

When I went over to look at the box I could feel the dust grate between my teeth. Chief Craig must have heard the racket because he came out of his office and helped me stand and look at the box.

"Think it's a bomb?" he asked in a bored voice.

"Why would anyone bother—particularly with a thing this size? And all the way from earth."

He nodded agreement and walked around to look at the other end. There was no sender's address anywhere on the outside. Finally we had to dig out the crowbar and I went to work on the top. After some prying it pulled free and fell off.

That was when we had our first look at Ned. We all would have been a lot happier if it had been our last look as well. If we had just put the lid back on and shipped the thing back to earth! I know now what they mean about Pandora's Box.

But we just stood there and stared like a couple of rubes. Ned lay motionless and stared back at us.

"A robot!" the Chief said.

"Very observant; it's easy to see you went to the police academy."

"Ha ha! Now find out what he's doing here."

I hadn't gone to the academy, but this was no handicap to my finding the letter. It was sticking up out of a thick book in a pocket in the box. The Chief took the letter and read it with little enthusiasm.

"Well, well! United Robotics have the brainstorm that … *robots, correctly used will tend to prove invaluable in police work* … they want us to co-operate in a field test … *robot enclosed is the latest experimental model; valued at 120,000 credits*."

We both looked back at the robot, sharing the wish that the credits had been in the box instead of it. The Chief frowned and

moved his lips through the rest of the letter. I wondered how we got the robot out of its plywood coffin.

Experimental model or not, this was a nice-looking hunk of machinery. A uniform navy-blue all over, though the outlet cases, hooks and such were a metallic gold. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to get that effect. This was as close as a robot could look to a cop in uniform, without being a joke. All that seemed to be missing was the badge and gun.

Then I noticed the tiny glow of light in the robot's eye lenses. It had never occurred to me before that the thing might be turned on. There was nothing to lose by finding out.

"Get out of that box," I said.

The robot came up smooth and fast as a rocket, landing two feet in front of me and whipping out a snappy salute.

"Police Experimental Robot, serial number XPO-456-934B, reporting for duty, sir."

His voice quivered with alertness and I could almost hear the humming of those taut cable muscles. He may have had a stainless steel hide and a bunch of wires for a brain—but he spelled rookie cop to me just the same. The fact that he was man-height with two arms, two legs and that painted-on uniform helped. All I had to do was squint my eyes a bit and there stood Ned the Rookie Cop. Fresh out of school and raring to go. I shook my head to get rid of the illusion. This was just six feet of machine that boffins and brain-boys had turned out for their own amusement.

"Relax, Ned," I said. He was still holding the salute. "At ease. You'll get a hernia of your exhaust pipe if you stay so tense. Anyways, I'm just the sergeant here. That's the Chief of Police over there."

Ned did an about face and slid over to the Chief with that same greased-lightning motion. The Chief just looked at him like something that sprang out from under the hood of a car, while Ned went through the same report routine.

"I wonder if it does anything else beside salute and report," the Chief said while he walked around the robot, looking it over like a dog with a hydrant.

"The functions, operations and responsible courses of action open to the Police Experimental Robots are outlined on pages 184 to 213 of the manual." Ned's voice was muffled for a second while he half-dived back into his case and came up with the volume mentioned.

"A detailed breakdown of these will also be found on pages 1035 to 1267 inclusive."

The Chief, who has trouble reading an entire comic page at one sitting, turned the 6-inch-thick book over in his hands like it would maybe bite him. When he had a rough idea of how much it weighed and a good feel of the binding he threw it on my desk.

"Take care of this," he said to me as he headed towards his office. "And the robot, too. Do something with it." The Chief's span of attention never was great and it had been strained to the limit this time.

I flipped through the book, wondering. One thing I never have had much to do with is robots, so I know just as much about them as any Joe in the street. Probably less. The book was filled with pages of fine print, fancy mathematics, wiring diagrams and charts in nine colors and that kind of thing. It needed close attention. Which attention I was not prepared to give at the time. The book slid shut and I eyed the newest employee of the city of Nineport.

"There is a broom behind the door. Do you know how to use it?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case you will sweep out this room, raising as small a cloud of dust as possible at the same time."

He did a very neat job of it.

I watched 120,000 credits worth of machinery making a tidy pile of butts and sand and wondered why it had been sent to Nineport. Probably because there wasn't another police force in the solar system that was smaller or more unimportant than ours. The engineers must have figured this would be a good spot for a field test. Even if the thing blew up, nobody would really mind. There would probably be someone along some day to get a report on it. Well, they had picked the right spot all right. Nineport was just a little bit beyond nowhere.

Which, of course, was why I was there. I was the only real cop on the force. They needed at least one to give an illusion of the wheels going around. The Chief, Alonzo Craig, had just enough sense to take graft without dropping the money. There were two patrolmen. One old and drunk most of the time. The other so young the only scar he had was the mark of the attram. I had ten years on a metropolitan force, earthside. Why I left is nobody's damn business. I have long since paid for any mistakes I made there by ending up in Nineport.

Nineport is not a city, it's just a place where people stop. The only permanent citizens are the ones who cater to those on the way through. Hotel keepers, restaurant owners, gamblers, barkeeps, and the rest.

There is a spaceport, but only some freighters come there. To pick up the metal from some of the mines that are still working. Some of the settlers still came in for supplies. You might say that Nineport was a town that just missed the boat. In a hundred years I doubt if there will be enough left sticking of the sand to even tell where it used to be. I won't be there either, so I couldn't care less.

I went back to the blotter. Five drunks in the tank, an average night's haul. While I wrote them up Fats dragged in the sixth one.

"Locked himself in the ladies' john at the spaceport and resisting arrest," he reported.

"D and D. Throw him in with the rest."

Fats steered his limp victim across the floor, matching him step for dragging step. I always marveled at the way Fats took care of drunks, since he usually had more under his belt than they had. I have never seen him falling down drunk or completely sober. About all he was good for was keeping a blurred eye on the lockup and running in drunks. He did well at that. No matter what they crawled under or on top of, he found them. No doubt due to the same shared natural instincts.

Fats clanged the door behind number six and weaved his way back in. "What's that?" he asked, peering at the robot along the purple beauty of his nose.

"That is a robot. I have forgotten the number his mother gave him at the factory so we will call him Ned. He works here now."

"Good for him! He can clean up the tank after we throw the bums out."

"That's *my* job," Billy said coming in through the front door. He clutched his nightstick and scowled out from under the brim of his uniform cap. It is not that Billy is stupid, just that most of his strength has gone into his back instead of his mind.

"That's Ned's job now because you have a promotion. You are going to help me with some of my work."

Billy came in very handy at times and I was anxious that the force shouldn't lose him. My explanation cheered him because he sat down by Fats and watched Ned do the floor.

That's the way things went for about a week. We watched Ned

sweep and polish until the station began to take on a positively antiseptic look. The Chief, who always has an eye out for that type of thing, found out that Ned could file the odd ton of reports and paperwork that cluttered his office. All this kept the robot busy, and we got so used to him we were hardly aware he was around. I knew he had moved the packing case into the storeroom and fixed himself up a cozy sort of robot dormitory-coffin. Other than that I didn't know or care.

The operation manual was buried in my desk and I never looked at it. If I had, I might have had some idea of the big changes that were in store. None of us knew the littlest bit about what a robot can or cannot do. Ned was working nicely as a combination janitor-file clerk and should have stayed that way. He would have too if the Chief hadn't been so lazy. That's what started it all.

It was around nine at night and the Chief was just going home when the call came in. He took it, listened for a moment, then hung up.

"Greenback's liquor store. He got held up again. Says to come at once."

"That's a change. Usually we don't hear about it until a month later. What's he paying protection money for if China Joe ain't protecting? What's the rush now?"

The Chief chewed his loose lip for a while, finally and painfully reached a decision.

"You better go around and see what the trouble is."

"Sure," I said reaching for my cap. "But no one else is around, you'll have to watch the desk until I get back."

"That's no good," he moaned. "I'm dying from hunger and sitting here isn't going to help me any."

"I will go take the report," Ned said, stepping forward and snapping his usual well-greased salute.

At first the Chief wasn't buying. You would think the water cooler came to life and offered to take over his job.

"How could *you* take a report?" he growled, putting the wise-guy water cooler in its place. But he had phrased his little insult as a question so he had only himself to blame. In exactly three minutes Ned gave the Chief a summary of the routine necessary for a police officer to make a report on an armed robbery or other reported theft. From the glazed look in Chief's protruding eyes I could tell Ned had quickly passed the boundaries of the Chief's meager

knowledge.

"Enough!" the harried man finally gasped. "If you know so much why don't you make a report?"

Which to me sounded like another version of "*if you're so damned smart why ain't you rich?*" which we used to snarl at the brainy kids in grammar school. Ned took such things literally though, and turned towards the door.

"Do you mean you wish me to make a report on this robbery?"

"Yes," the Chief said just to get rid of him, and we watched his blue shape vanish through the door.

"He must be brighter than he looks," I said. "He never stopped to ask where Greenback's store is."

The Chief nodded and the phone rang again. His hand was still resting on it so he picked it up by reflex. He listened for a second and you would have thought someone was pumping blood out of his heel from the way his face turned white.

"The holdup's still on," he finally gasped. "Greenback's delivery boy is on the line—calling back to see where we are. Says he's under a table in the back room … "

I never heard the rest of it because I was out the door and into the car. There were a hundred things that could happen if Ned got there before me. Guns could go off, people hurt, lots of things. And the police would be to blame for it all—sending a tin robot to do a cop's job. Maybe the Chief had ordered Ned there, but clearly as if the words were painted on the windshield of the car, I knew I would be dragged into it. It never gets very warm on Mars, but I was sweating.

Nineport has fourteen traffic regulations and I broke all of them before I had gone a block. Fast as I was, Ned was faster. As I turned the corner I saw him open the door of Greenback's store and walk in. I screamed brakes in behind him and arrived just in time to have a gallery seat. A shooting gallery at that.

There were two holdup punks, one behind the counter making like a clerk and the other lounging off to the side. Their guns were out of sight, but blue-coated Ned busting through the door like that was too much for their keyed up nerves. Up came both guns like they were on strings and Ned stopped dead. I grabbed for my own gun and waited for pieces of busted robot to come flying through the window.

Ned's reflexes were great. Which I suppose is what you should

expect of a robot.

"DROP YOUR GUNS, YOU ARE UNDER ARREST."

He must have had on full power or something, his voice blasted so loud my ears hurt. The result was just what you might expect. Both torpedoes let go at once and the air was filled with flying slugs. The show windows went out with a crash and I went down on my stomach. From the amount of noise I knew they both had recoilless .50's. You can't stop one of those slugs. They go right through you and anything else that happens to be in the way.

Except they didn't seem to be bothering Ned. The only notice he seemed to take was to cover his eyes. A little shield with a thin slit popped down over his eye lenses. Then he moved in on the first thug.

I knew he was fast, but not that fast. A couple of slugs jarred him as he came across the room, but before the punk could change his aim Ned had the gun in his hand. That was the end of that. He put on one of the sweetest hammer locks I have ever seen and neatly grabbed the gun when it dropped from the limp fingers. With the same motion that slipped the gun into a pouch he whipped out a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on the punk's wrists.

Holdupnik number two was heading for the door by then, and I was waiting to give him a warm reception. There was never any need. He hadn't gone halfway before Ned slid in front of him. There was a thud when they hit that didn't even shake Ned, but gave the other a glazed look. He never even knew it when Ned slipped the cuffs on him and dropped him down next to his partner.

I went in, took their guns from Ned, and made the arrest official. That was all Greenback saw when he crawled out from behind the counter and it was all I wanted him to see. The place was a foot deep in broken glass and smelled like the inside of a Jack Daniels bottle. Greenback began to howl like a wolf over his lost stock. He didn't seem to know any more about the phone call than I did, so I grabbed ahold of a pimply looking kid who staggered out of the storeroom. He was the one who had made the calls.

It turned out to be a matter of sheer stupidity. He had worked for Greenback only a few days and didn't have enough brains to realize that all holdups should be reported to the protection boys instead of the police. I told Greenback to wise up his boy, as look at the trouble that got caused. Then pushed the two ex-holdup men out to the car. Ned climbed in back with them and they clung together

like two waifs in a storm. The robot's only response was to pull a first aid kit from his hip and fix up a ricochet hole in one of the thugs that no one had noticed in the excitement.

The Chief was still sitting there with that bloodless look when we marched in. I didn't believe it could be done, but he went two shades whiter.

"You made the pinch," he whispered. Before I could straighten him out a second and more awful idea hit him. He grabbed a handful of shirt on the first torpedo and poked his face down. "You with China Joe," he snarled.

The punk made the error of trying to be cute so the Chief let him have one on the head with the open hand that set his eyes rolling like marbles. When the question got asked again he found the right answer.

"I never heard from no China Joe. We just hit town today and—"

"Freelance, by God," the Chief sighed and collapsed into his chair. "Lock 'em up and quickly tell me what in hell happened."

I slammed the gate on them and pointed a none too steady finger at Ned.

"There's the hero," I said. "Took them on single-handed, rassled them for a fall and made the capture. He is a one-robot tornado, a power for good in this otherwise evil community. And he's bulletproof too." I ran a finger over Ned's broad chest. The paint was chipped by the slugs, but the metal was hardly scratched.

"This is going to cause me trouble, big trouble," the Chief wailed.

I knew he meant with the protection boys. They did not like punks getting arrested and guns going off without their okay. But Ned thought the Chief had other worries and rushed in to put them right. "There will be no trouble. At no time did I violate any of the Robotic Restriction Laws, they are part of my control circuits and therefore fully automatic. The men who drew their guns violated both robotic and human law when they threatened violence. I did not injure the men—merely restrained them."

It was all over the Chief's head, but I liked to think *I* could follow it. And I *had* been wondering how a robot—a machine—could be involved in something like law application and violence. Ned had the answer to that one too.

"Robots have been assuming these functions for years. Don't recording radar meters pass judgment on human violation of

automobile regulations? A robot alcohol detector is better qualified to assess the sobriety of a prisoner than the arresting officer. At one time robots were even allowed to make their own decisions about killing. Before the Robotic Restriction Laws automatic gun-pointers were in general use. Their final development was a self-contained battery of large anti-aircraft guns. Automatic scan radar detected all aircraft in the vicinity. Those that could not return the correct identifying signal had their courses tracked and computed, automatic fuse-cutters and loaders readied the computer-aimed guns—which were fired by the robot mechanism."

There was little I could argue about with Ned. Except maybe his college-professor vocabulary. So I switched the attack.

"But a robot can't take the place of a cop, it's a complex human job."

"Of course it is, but taking a human policeman's place is not the function of a police robot. Primarily I combine the functions of numerous pieces of police equipment, integrating their operations and making them instantly available. In addition I can aid in the*mechanical* processes of law enforcement. If you arrest a man you handcuff him. But if you order me to do it, I have made no moral decision. I am just a machine for attaching handcuffs at that point … "

My raised hand cut off the flow of robotic argument. Ned was hipped to his ears with facts and figures and I had a good idea who would come off second best in any continued discussion. No laws had been broken when Ned made the pinch, that was for sure. But there are other laws than those that appear on the books.

"China Joe is not going to like this, not at all," the Chief said, speaking my own thoughts.

The law of Tooth and Claw. That's one that wasn't in the law books. And that was what ran Nineport. The place was just big enough to have a good population of gambling joints, bawdy houses and drunk-rollers. They were all run by China Joe. As was the police department. We were all in his pocket and you might say he was the one who paid our wages. This is not the kind of thing, though, that you explain to a robot.

"Yeah, China Joe."

I thought it was an echo at first, then realized that someone had eased in the door behind me. Something called Alex. Six feet of bone, muscle and trouble. China Joe's right hand man. He imitated

a smile at the Chief who sank a bit lower in his chair.

"China Joe wants you should tell him why you got smart cops going around and putting the arm on people and letting them shoot up good liquor. He's mostly angry about the hooch. He says that he had enough guff and after this you should—"

"I am putting you under Robot Arrest, pursuant to article 46, paragraph 19 of the revised statutes … "

Ned had done it before we realized he had even moved. Right in front of our eyes he was arresting Alex and signing our death warrants.

Alex was not slow. As he turned to see who had grabbed him, he had already dragged out this cannon. He got one shot in, square against Ned's chest, before the robot plucked the gun away and slipped on the cuffs. While we all gaped like dead fish, Ned recited the charge in what I swear was a satisfied tone.

"The prisoner is Peter Rakjomskj, alias Alex the Axe, wanted in Canal City for armed robbery and attempted murder. Also wanted by local police of Detroit, New York and Manchester on charges of … "

"*Get it off me!*" Alex howled. We might have too, and everything might have still been straightened out if Benny Bug hadn't heard the shot. He popped his head in the front door just long enough to roll his eyes over our little scene.

"Alex … they're puttin' the arm on Alex!"

Then he was gone and when I hit the door he was nowhere in sight. China Joe's boys always went around in pairs. And in ten minutes he would know all about it.

"Book him," I told Ned. "It wouldn't make any difference if we let him go now. The world has already come to an end."

Fats came in then, mumbling to himself. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder when he saw me.

"What's up? I see little Benny Bug come out of here like the place was on fire and almost get killed driving away?"

Then Fats saw Alex with the bracelets on and turned sober in one second. He just took a moment to gape, then his mind was made up. Without a trace of a stagger he walked over to the Chief and threw his badge on the desk in front of him.

"I am an old man and I drink too much to be a cop. Therefore I am resigning from the force. Because if that is whom I think it is over there with the cuffs on, I will not live to be a day older as long

as I am around here."

"Rat." The Chief growled in pain through his clenched teeth. "Deserting the sinking ship. Rat."

"Squeak," Fats said and left.

The Chief was beyond caring at this point. He didn't blink an eye when I took Fats' badge off the desk. I don't know why I did it, perhaps I thought it was only fair. Ned had started all the trouble and I was just angry enough to want him on the spot when it was finished. There were two rings on his chest plate, and I was not surprised when the badge pin fitted them neatly.

"There, now you are a real cop." Sarcasm dripped from the words. I should have realized that robots are immune to sarcasm. Ned took my statement at face value.

"This is a very great honor, not only for me but for all robots. I will do my best to fulfill all the obligations of the office." Jack Armstrong in tin underwear. I could hear the little motors in his guts humming with joy as he booked Alex.

If everything else hadn't been so bad I would have enjoyed that. Ned had more police equipment built into him than Nineport had ever owned. There was an ink pad that snapped out of one hip, and he efficiently rolled Alex's fingertips across it and stamped them on a card. Then he held the prisoner at arm's length while something clicked in his abdomen. Once more sideways and two instant photographs dropped out of a slot. The mug shots were stuck on the card, arrest details and such inserted. There was more like this, but I forced myself away. There were more important things to think about.

Like staying alive.

"Any ideas, Chief?"

A groan was my only answer so I let it go at that. Billy, the balance of the police force, came in then. I gave him a quick rundown. Either through stupidity or guts he elected to stay, and I was proud of the boy. Ned locked away the latest prisoner and began sweeping up.

That was the way we were when China Joe walked in.

Even though we were expecting it, it was still a shock. He had a bunch of his toughest hoods with him and they crowded through the door like an overweight baseball team. China Joe was in front, hands buried in the sleeves of his long mandarin gown. No expression at all on his ascetic features. He didn't waste time talking

to us, just gave the word to his own boys.

"Clean this place up. The new police Chief will be here in a while and I don't want him to see any bums hanging around."

It made me angry. Even with the graft I like to feel I'm still a cop. Not on a cheap punk's payroll. I was also curious about China Joe. Had been ever since I tried to get a line on him and never found a thing. I still wanted to know.

"Ned, take a good look at that Chinese guy in the rayon bathrobe and let me know who he is."

My, but those electronic circuits work fast. Ned shot the answer back like a straight man who had been rehearsing his lines for weeks.

"He is a pseudo-oriental, utilizing a natural sallowness of the skin heightened with dye. He is not Chinese. There has also been an operation on his eyes, scars of which are still visible. This has been undoubtedly done in an attempt to conceal his real identity, but Bertillon measurements of his ears and other features make identity positive. He is on the Very Wanted list of Interpol and his real name is … "

China Joe was angry, and with a reason.

"That's the *thing* … that big-mouthed tin radio set over there. We heard about it and we're taking care of it!"

The mob jumped aside then or hit the deck and I saw there was a guy kneeling in the door with a rocket launcher. Shaped anti-tank charges, no doubt. That was my last thought as the thing let go with a "whoosh."

Maybe you can hit a tank with one of those. But not a robot. At least not a police robot. Ned was sliding across the floor on his face when the back wall blew up. There was no second shot. Ned closed his hand on the tube of the bazooka and it was so much old drainpipe.

Billy decided then that anyone who fired a rocket in a police station was breaking the law, so he moved in with his club. I was right behind him since I did not want to miss any of the fun. Ned was at the bottom somewhere, but I didn't doubt he could take care of himself.

There were a couple of muffled shots and someone screamed. No one fired after that because we were too tangled up. A punk named Brooklyn Eddie hit me on the side of the head with his gunbutt and I broke his nose all over his face with my fist.

There is a kind of a fog over everything after that. But I do remember it was very busy for a while.

When the fog lifted a bit I realized I was the only one still standing. Or leaning rather. It was a good thing the wall was there.

Ned came in through the street door carrying a very bashed-looking Brooklyn Eddie. I hoped I had done all that. Eddie's wrists were fastened together with cuffs. Ned laid him gently next to the heap of thugs—who I suddenly realized all wore the same kind of handcuffs. I wondered vaguely if Ned made them as he needed them or had a supply tucked away in a hollow leg or something.

There was a chair a few feet away and sitting down helped.

Blood was all over everything and if a couple of the hoods hadn't groaned I would have thought they were corpses. One was, I noticed suddenly. A bullet had caught him in the chest, most of the blood was probably his.

Ned burrowed in the bodies for a moment and dragged Billy out. He was unconscious. A big smile on his face and the splintered remains of his nightstick still stuck in his fist. It takes very little to make some people happy. A bullet had gone through his leg and he never moved while Ned ripped the pants leg off and put on a bandage.

"The spurious China Joe and one other man escaped in a car," Ned reported.

"Don't let it worry you," I managed to croak. "Your batting average still leads the league."

It was then I realized the Chief was still sitting in his chair, where he had been when the brouhaha started. Still slumped down with that glazed look. Only after I started to talk to him did I realize that Alonzo Craig, Chief of Police of Nineport, was now dead.

A single shot. Small caliber gun, maybe a .22. Right through the heart and what blood there had been was soaked up by his clothes. I had a good idea where the gun would be that fired that shot. A small gun, the kind that would fit in a wide Chinese sleeve.

I wasn't tired or groggy any more. Just angry. Maybe he hadn't been the brightest or most honest guy in the world. But he deserved a better end than that. Knocked off by a two-bit racket boss who thought he was being crossed.

Right about then I realized I had a big decision to make. With Billy out of the fight and Fats gone I was the Nineport police force.

All I had to do to be clear of this mess was to walk out the door and keep going. I would be safe enough.

Ned buzzed by, picked up two of the thugs, and hauled them off to the cells.

Maybe it was the sight of his blue back or maybe I was tired of running. Either way my mind was made up before I realized it. I carefully took off the Chief's gold badge and put it on in place of my old one.

"The new Chief of Police of Nineport," I said to no one in particular.

"Yes, sir," Ned said as he passed. He put one of the prisoners down long enough to salute, then went on with his work. I returned the salute.

The hospital meat wagon hauled away the dead and wounded. I took an evil pleasure in ignoring the questioning stares of the attendants. After the doc fixed the side of my head, everyone cleared out. Ned mopped up the floor. I ate ten aspirin and waited for the hammering to stop so I could think what to do next.

When I pulled my thoughts together the answer was obvious. Too obvious. I made as long a job as I could of reloading my gun.

"Refill your handcuff box, Ned. We are going out."

Like a good cop he asked no questions. I locked the outside door when we left and gave him the key.

"Here. There's a good chance you will be the only one left to use this before the day is over."

I stretched the drive over to China Joe's place just as much as I could. Trying to figure if there was another way of doing it. There wasn't. Murder had been done and Joe was the boy I was going to pin it on. So I had to get him.

The best I could do was stop around the corner and give Ned a briefing.

"This combination bar and dice-room is the sole property of he whom we will still call China Joe until there is time for you to give me a rundown on him. Right now I got enough distractions. What we have to do is go in there, find Joe and bring him to justice. Simple?"

"Simple," Ned answered in his sharp Joe-college voice. "But wouldn't it be simpler to make the arrest now, when he is leaving in that car, instead of waiting until he returns?"

The car in mention was doing sixty as it came out of the alley ahead of us. I only had a glimpse of Joe in the back seat as it tore by us.

"Stop them!" I shouted, mostly for my own benefit since I was driving. I tried to shift gears and start the engine at the same time, and succeeded in doing exactly nothing.

So Ned stopped them. It had been phrased as an order. He leaned his head out of the window and I saw at once why most of his equipment was located in his torso. Probably his brain as well. There sure wasn't much room left in his head when that cannon was tucked away in there.

A .75 recoilless. A plate swiveled back right where his nose should have been if he had one, and the big muzzle pointed out. It's a neat idea when you think about it. Right between the eyes for good aiming, up high, always ready.

The BOOM BOOM almost took my head off. Of course Ned was a perfect shot—so would I be with a computer for a brain. He had holed one rear tire with each slug and the car flap-flapped to a stop a little ways down the road. I climbed out slowly while Ned sprinted there in seconds flat. They didn't even try to run this time. What little nerve they had left must have been shattered by the smoking muzzle of that .75 poking out from between Ned's eyes. Robots are neat about things like that so he must have left it sticking out deliberate. Probably had a course in psychology back in robot school.

Three of them in the car, all waving their hands in the air like the last reel of a western. And the rear floor covered with interesting little suitcases.

Everyone came along quietly.

China Joe only snarled while Ned told me that his name really was Stantin and the Elmira hot seat was kept warm all the time in hopes he would be back. I promised Joe-Stantin I would be happy to arrange it that same day. Thereby not worrying about any slip-ups with the local authorities. The rest of the mob would stand trial in Canal City.

It was a very busy day.

Things have quieted down a good deal since then. Billy is out of the hospital and wearing my old sergeant's stripes. Even Fats is back, though he is sober once in a while now and has trouble looking me in the eye. We don't have much to do because in

addition to being a quiet town this is now an honest one.

Ned is on foot patrol nights and in charge of the lab and files days. Maybe the Policeman's Benevolent wouldn't like that, but Ned doesn't seem to mind. He touched up all the bullet scratches and keeps his badge polished. I know a robot can't be happy or sad—but Ned *seems* to be happy.

Sometimes I would swear I can hear him humming to himself. But, of course, that is only the motors and things going around.

When you start thinking about it, I suppose we set some kind of precedent here. What with putting on a robot as a full-fledged police officer. No one ever came around from the factory yet, so I have never found out if we're the first or not.

And I'll tell you something else. I'm not going to stay in this broken-down town forever. I have some letters out now, looking for a new job.

So some people are going to be *very* surprised when they see who their new Chief of Police is after *I* leave.

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